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ABSTRACT

The booklet is designed to help learning disabled (LD) adults become economically independent and fulfill their potential. Introductory chapters define LD and specify such types of LD as auditory perceptual problems, catastrophic responses, directional problems, disinhibition, perceptual problems, and short term memory problems. Psychological effects of never being diagnosed are noted as well as potential dangers of being labeled. Suggestions for securing a professional diagnosis and for diagnosing one's self are given. Parents are encouraged to find practical solutions to family life problems and to teach independent living skills. Vocational aspects are examined, including searching for a job, choosing the right one, and being proud of one's job. Ideas are listed for analyzing strengths and weaknesses to overcome one's own handicap. The importance of social skills training is stressed. Practical coping strategies for dealing with perceptual problems (visual perception, dyslexia, and auditory perception) and central nervous system disorganization (directionality, hyperactivity, disinhibition, catastrophic response, and perseveration) are addressed. A final chapter lists sources of further information, professional help, and self help groups. (CL)

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Steps to Independence for People with Learning Disabilities

by Dale Brown

This pamphlet is written for learning disabled people seeking independence . . . for parents who will help along the way . . . for professionals and others who want to lend a hand.

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About the Author

Dale Brown works as a public information specialist at the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. She has written and spoken extensively on learning disabled adults, including such topics as counseling, sexuality and religious education. She advises many federal agencies on their policies related to learning disabilities.

As a volunteer, Ms. Brown founded the Association of Learning Disabled Adults, a self-help group in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. It served as a model chapter for the nation, and she has helped many local groups organize. At the 1980 Annual Meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, she coordinated the first national meeting of learning disabled adults. The National Network of Learning Disabled Adults, which formed after this gathering, elected her as its first chairperson.

"Many of the ideas for this publication came from the process of overcoming my perceptual problems and from the hundreds of learning disabled adults I have met," she stated. "If I had space, I would list them all."

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Foreword

The author wishes to express special thanks to Sam D. Clements, Ph.D. Dr. Clements, Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, provided professional consultation for this pamphlet. He served as Chairman of *Task Force I of the National Project on Minimal Brain Dysfunction/Specific Learning Disabilities in Children,* cosponsored by the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness and the National Easter Seal Society for Crippled Children and Adults. Task Force I defined "minimal brain dysfunction" and delineated major issues of the field. Dr. Clements has written numerous scientific articles on learning disabilities and collaborated with John E. Peters, M.D., to write "Physician's Handbook: Screening for Minimal Brain Dysfunction."

Three successful learning disabled adults, Jeffrey Barsch, Roa Lynn and Dian Ridenour, shared their experiences, and the author is grateful for their help. Mr. Barsch is the founder and director of the Learning Disability Program at Ventura Community College in California. He is the author of "Spelling Plus: A Guide to the World of Spelling for the Learning Disabled Adult." He developed and produced the Barsch Learning Style Preference Test. Mr. Barsch is currently completing requirements for a Doctorate degree in Sociology of Education and Community College Administration.

Ms. Lynn is the author of "Learning Disabilities: An Overview of Theories, Approaches and Politics," a book based on research sponsored by The Rockefeller Brothers Fund. She is a research analyst for the budget office of the Utah State Government and is currently a member of the Utah Council for Handicapped and Developmentally Disabled Persons. As a reporter and writer, Ms. Lynn has contributed to Time magazine and Women's Wear Daily.

Ms. Ridenour is the cofounder of Time Out to Enjoy, Inc., the first national consumer group of learning disabled adults. She is currently completing requirements for a Master's of Social Work degree.

The author also wishes to thank Barbara Scheiber, Director of the Parents' Campaign for Handicapped Children and Youth, for the many hours she devoted to providing counselling and editing for this booklet. Her ongoing support made this publication a reality. The staff of Closer Look also provided invaluable advice and assistance.

All of these people contributed their ideas. However, the opinions that are expressed in this publication are solely those of the author.

Dale Brown
July 1980

Note: Throughout the text "he" and "she," "son" and "daughter" have been used at random. The entire booklet applies equally to men and to women who have learning disabilities.

Introduction

Imagine yourself in a foreign country. You cannot read the signs. You think you know the language, but you speak slowly and people get impatient. They seem to misdirect you. Cashiers tell you the wrong prices. When you follow directions, you do everything wrong. Conversation is a strain. It quickly tires you.

You don't know the customs. When you speak to people, they seem uncomfortable and look away. An official explains the money system to you and a group of other newcomers. Everyone but you grasps it quickly.

You are placed with a native family. Everything is difficult. Your "mother" a[illegible]you to sweep the floor. You try hard, but the broom doesn't catch the dust. Your "sister" sweeps easily. Pencil points keep breaking when you write, but everyone else writes without any problem. There are no street signs or addresses. So every time your "mother" asks you to run an errand, you get lost. Your family often gets angry with you. You want to be on your own, but you do not know where else to live.

You are expected to find employment, but you can't fill out the applications. Finally, you take the forms home and ask your "brother" to fill them out. Even so, your interviews end quickly. You are rejected from forty jobs.

How would you feel? Stupid? Inferior? Angry at your "family"? As if everyone were ganging up against you?

The situation described above is similar to life as a learning disabled person. As a matter of fact, many people with learning disabilities have even *more* difficulty right in their own homes. Some are unsure of where their bodies are in space. They do not have a secure sense of the floor beneath their feet. They cannot tell how far away the wall is. They cannot tell the difference between left and right.

Others have the same difficulty with English that a nonlearning disabled person would have with a foreign language. They have trouble finding the right words and often have to struggle to express simple ideas. And they may repeatedly misunderstand what they hear.

Some cannot read, or read with great difficulty. Road signs, menus and job applications are impossible to use.

People who do *not* have learning disabilities might have learned to adjust more easily in that foreign country. They might have the confidence to learn the language, figure out the customs, get along with the "family" and find a job. That confidence comes from years of successful living which many learning disabled adults lack.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAMPHLET

Many people with learning disabilities, including Jeffrey Barsch, Roa Lynn and Dian Ridenour, who are mentioned in the Foreword, have become successful despite their handicaps. Well-known author of mystery novels Agatha Christie was considered the

"slow one" of the family and had great difficulty with writing and spelling. Jess Oppenheimer, producer and head writer for the popular "I Love Lucy" TV series, surmounted severe visual perceptual problems. David H. Welch overcame dyslexia and dysgraphia to achieve his goal of becoming a lawyer.

One does not have to be famous in order to be successful. People like these are also successes: a young man who graduates from high school and visits shoe repair shop after shoe repair shop until one owner hires him as an apprentice; a woman who has raised five children; a man who has spent three years getting his master's degree and is now a vocational rehabilitation counselor; a teenage girl who sells cosmetics door-to-door to earn college money.

But many learning disabled adults find that success seems beyond them. They have difficulty with the basic tasks of life. Some cannot find employment. Others have no friends. Many depend on their parents for money. Some get jobs that are beneath their abilities. Others are supported by welfare. Some get into trouble and end up in jail or in a mental hospital.

The purpose of this booklet is to help learning disabled adults become economically independent and reach their full potential. The contents include:

- definitions of different types of learning disabilities
- ways to get professional diagnosis
- ways to diagnose your own problems
- ways that parents can help a learning disabled person find a home, manage money, cook, be self-sufficient
- steps to take to find a job, make friends, use one's strengths to overcome one's handicap
- the advantages of having learning disabilities.

We hope this guide will help you as you take on the challenge of becoming independent. Good luck!

1

Who Is Learning Disabled?

Learning disabled adults receive inaccurate information through their senses and/or have trouble processing that information. Like static on the radio or a bad TV picture, the information becomes garbled as it travels from the eye, ear or skin to the brain.

The inaccurate sensory information leads to problems with reading, writing or other vital activities such as driving. Either these skills have not been learned, have been learned after heroic effort or have been learned poorly. Many learning disabled adults have trouble listening and speaking. Common problems are:

- accident proneness
- having to work longer to produce the same amount of work as coworkers
- having to choose between carelessness and slowness
- frequent errors
- often misunderstanding people
- having to do consciously what comes naturally to others
- academic failure
- vocational failure.

DEFINING THE HANDICAP

The handicap is perplexing and has many names and definitions. In 1966, Sam Clements as Chairman of *Task Force I of the National Project on Minimal Brain Dysfunction/Specific Learning Disabilities in Children* defined minimal brain dysfunction as follows:

> "Minimal Brain Dysfunction as a diagnostic and descriptive category refers to children of near average, average or above average general intelligence with certain learning and/or behavioral disabilities ranging from mild to severe, which are associated with deviations of function of the central nervous system. These deviations may manifest themselves by various combinations of impairment in perception, conceptualization, language, memory and control of attention, impulse or motor function. These aberrations may arise from genetic variations, biochemical irregularities, perinatal brain insults or other illnesses or injuries sustained during the years critical for the development and maturation of the central nervous system or from unknown causes. During the school years, a variety of learning disabilities is the most prominent manifestation of the condition."

The Task Force I definition relates to the cause of learning disabilities. However, a medical examination cannot always pick up the existence of minimal brain dysfunction. A definition that does describe learning disabilities but does not rely on medical evidence is important. The 1967 National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children

developed a definition which became the basis for the definition used in The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142:

> "The term 'children with specific learning disabilities' means those children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. Such disorders include such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage."

While there is some discussion about the completeness of this definition, it has focused attention on a group of children whose educational needs are unique. Some people feel it needs to be expanded to include the many learning disabled people who have other handicaps, such as blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and those who are economically disadvantaged. In recent years, the concepts underlying both definitions have been expanded to include adults.

Learning disabilities are different from mental retardation. Mentally retarded persons have limited learning capacity. From childhood they consistently develop at a slower-than-average rate.

Learning disabled people, on the other hand, have specific trouble with perception or taking information in through their senses. In general, they are capable of learning and performing at their age level, but their learning is affected by the problems they have with perception. They tend to have unique ways of gathering information from the world around them.

In order to teach both mentally retarded and learning disabled people, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of individual difficulties as well as an open mind about individual potential.

In the next chapter, many different kinds of learning disabilities are defined. These should be helpful in deciding how each individual can overcome obstacles to learning and can be what is in each of them to be.

2

Types of Learning Disabilities

The term "learning disability" covers many problems. Definitions of these problems are not standardized. This booklet will use the terms and definitions that follow:

ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES

Problems with learning basic academic skills. These include:
Dyscalculia— Inability to do math.
Dysgraphia — Inability to write.
Dyslexia — Inability to read.

ASSOCIATED REACTIONS

One part of the body moves involuntarily because of the movement of another part of the body: for instance, the left arm may move a little when the right arm moves or one arm may move when the head turns.

AUDITORY PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Trouble taking information in through the sense of hearing and/or processing that information. People with this problem frequently hear inaccurately. A sequencing or discrimination error can change the meaning of an entire message: for example, one might hear "I ran to the car," instead of "I rented the car." People with auditory handicaps frequently do not hear unaccented syllables. They may hear "formed" instead of "performed," "seven" instead of "seventy." Some auditory perceptual handicaps are:
Auditory discrimination problem—Trouble telling the difference between similar sounds, such as "th" and "f" or "m" and "n"; hearing "seventeen" instead of "seventy"; hearing an angry rather than a joking tone of voice.
Auditory figure-ground problem—Trouble hearing a sound over background noise, for example, being unable to hear the telephone ring when one is listening to the radio, or having difficulty hearing someone

talk at a party when music is playing.
Auditory sequencing problem—Trouble hearing sounds in the correct order, for example, hearing "nine-four" instead of "four-nine"; hearing "treats" instead of "street"; hearing music garbled because the melody is perceived out of order.

CATASTROPHIC RESPONSE

An involuntary reaction to too many sights, sounds, extreme emotions or other strong stimuli. This may result in losing one's temper, becoming dazed or unaware of one's surroundings, or "freezing" for a short time.

COGNITIVE PROBLEM

Trouble with thinking. Each perceptual problem has an effect on one's thoughts. Some cognitive problems are:
Cognitive sequencing problem—Trouble thinking in an orderly, logical way. A person with this problem might tend to jump to conclusions.
Cognitive discrimination problem—Trouble distinguishing between two similar concepts, such as love and like, or argue and fight.

CROSSING THE MIDLINE

Trouble with moving one's limbs across the center of the body. This could include: difficulty writing across a page, sweeping a floor or controlling a steering wheel.

DIRECTIONAL PROBLEM

Trouble automatically distinguishing left from right; learning north, south, east, west; learning the layout of a large symmetrical building.

DISINHIBITION

Difficulty in behaving appropriately in an automatic way. This is a problem with the self-governing part of the brain that stops one from doing such things as laughing at the wrong time, talking aloud to oneself, coughing without covering the mouth. A disinhibited person might abruptly interrupt a conversation or talk aloud to himself in public.

INTERSENSORY PROBLEM

Trouble using two senses at once or associating two senses, for instance, not realizing that the letter "d" which is seen, is the same as the sound "d" when it is spoken; being unable to feel someone tap you on the shoulder while you are reading; being unable to listen to conversation and drive at the same time.

MEMORY PROBLEM, SHORT-TERM

Trouble remembering: names, numbers, specific facts, what happened a few minutes ago. A poor memory makes academic success difficult.

MOTOR PROBLEM

Trouble moving one's body efficiently to achieve a certain goal. Some motor problems are:

Perceptual motor problems—Trouble performing a task requiring coordination because of inaccurate information received through the senses. This may result in clumsiness, difficulty in participating in simple sports, awkward or stiff movements.

Visual motor problem—Trouble seeing something and then doing it: learning a dance step while watching a teacher, copying something off a blackboard, throwing something at a target.

Auditory motor problem—Trouble hearing something and then doing it: following verbal directions, dancing to a rhythmic beat, taking notes in a lecture.

PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Trouble taking information in through one's senses and/or processing that information.

PROPRIOCEPTIVE PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Trouble knowing where one is in space. A person with this problem might not be able to tell the position of her limbs with her eyes closed.

SOFT NEUROLOGICAL SIGNS

Signs of central nervous system dysfunction that can be observed: staring, turning the head instead of moving the eyes, inability to look people in the eye, not holding the head straight, being easily startled.

TACTILE PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Trouble taking information in through the sense of touch. Some tactile handicaps are:

Immature tactile system—People with this problem dislike being touched lightly, but crave pressure touch, such as being hugged hard or huddling with knees to their chest. Until the immaturity is overcome, tactile discrimination cannot develop.

Tactile defensiveness—Tendency to avoid being touched because of an immature tactile system.

Tactile discrimination problem—Trouble feeling the difference between similar objects, such as bond or regular typing paper, light or heavy sandpaper, silk or cotton, ripe or unripe cantaloupe.

Tactile pressure problem—Trouble judging the right amount of pressure needed to perform motor acts: holding an egg in two fingers without breaking or dropping it, tapping someone playfully rather than hitting them.

VESTIBULAR PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Problem with one's sense of balance, for example, a tendency to lose one's footing on a curb.

VISUAL PERCEPTUAL PROBLEM

Trouble taking information in through the sense of sight and/or processing that information. Some visual perceptual handicaps are:

Visual figure-ground problem—Trouble seeing a specific image within a competing background: finding a face in a crowd, finding keys on a crowded desk, picking out one line of print from the other lines in a book. People with this problem cannot see things that others can see; to them the keys on a crowded desk are not there.

Visual sequencing problem—Trouble seeing things in the correct order, for instance, seeing letters or numbers reversed, seeing two cans reversed on a shelf of cans. The person with this problem actually sees the word incorrectly. He sees "was" instead of "saw."

Visual discrimination problem—Trouble seeing the difference between two similar objects, such as, the letters "v" and "u" or "e" and "c"; the difference between two shades of one color or two similar types of leaves. The person with this problem sees the two similar objects as alike.

Depth perception problem—Trouble perceiving how far away (or near) an object may be: for instance, you may not know how close the fork is to your hand or how far to reach to put a glass of water on the table.

3

Diagnosing Learning Disabilities

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF A HANDICAP WITH NO NAME

Most learning disabled adults are not diagnosed. They do not understand their problem. They are often rejected by others because they lack social skills and have soft neurological signs that make them seem odd. They know they must struggle for what comes easily to others. When they compare themselves to people of their age, they see that they are doing poorly.

Jill Gale, a learning disabled college student, described her early frustration with school: "In first grade, I remember having to copy stories from our reading textbook. I was always the last one done and my work was always the messiest. I didn't understand why it took me so long." (Teacher magazine, December 1977)

Like Jill Gale, most learning disabled adults don't know why tasks are hard for them. They hunt for reasons. Since they lack knowledge of their learning disabilities, four possible causes seem to explain their problems: craziness, low intelligence, not trying and personal weakness. All four explanations lead to low self-image which paralyzes their desire to improve. Thus, some learning disabled people actually become emotionally disturbed, stop trying and fail to develop their intelligence. Society may label them "mentally retarded," "mentally ill" or "unmotivated."

Many learning disabled adults seek help. But unfortunately, learning disabilities are not well-known. One learning disabled man was told by a psychiatrist he was "unconsciously causing himself to fail." Vocational rehabilitation agency counselors are required by law to help the most severely handicapped people first. Learning disabilities are invisible, unrecognized and misunderstood. They are not considered severe.

Learning disabled people struggle alone. As they advance, they are not complimented. Instead, they are criticized or teased. A sixteen-year-old teenager described what it was like learning to dive: "As I practiced the other kids would make fun of me. They'd imitate me. Almost every time I jumped off the side of the pool someone was laughing. They complained because I splashed too much. Finally, I learned to dive. But nobody was happy for me."

Most people cannot teach themselves under these conditions. As a matter of fact, failure can become comforting. If one expects to fail, one avoids disappointment.

The inaccurate information received through the senses causes insecurity. If people cannot trust their senses or their bodies, what can they trust? Without knowing what the real problem is, they may blame others. People with auditory perceptual problems

sometimes believe that friends are lying to them. A social worker was convinced that staff members of her hospital set up meetings and told her the wrong time.

Thus, learning disabled adults become angry—angry at people who reject them and condemn them for "not trying," angry at people who seem to do everything so easily.

FINDING A NAME FOR THE HANDICAP

Fortunately, many learning disabled people do discover their learning disabilities. They may learn about them on TV or radio or in a book. A doctor, teacher, parent or counselor may recommend that they be diagnosed.

When they find out, some learning disabled people do not want to believe that they are handicapped. They have convinced themselves that they are failures and don't want to believe otherwise. Others fear that being handicapped means that they are unable to improve.

Most learning disabled people feel relieved to learn the cause of their problems. One construction worker who is unable to read said: "When the psychologist told me I had dyslexia, I couldn't control myself. I started to cry. He said, 'Why are you crying?' I replied, 'I'm crying because I'm happy. Now I know I'm not stupid. I understand why I have so many problems.' "

A Label Can Be Harmful

Some learning disabled people are diagnosed early. The lucky ones receive proper remediation and catch up with their peers.

But it's not enough to give a handicap a name. A label of any kind can be harmful if nothing is done to help the person improve. Sometimes, less is expected of a person labeled "handicapped." He or she tends to fulfill those low expectations and do poorly. In some schools learning disabled people are educated with mentally retarded people. The two handicaps are often thought of as the same, and the correct help is not provided.

Once a person has a label, many problems which have nothing to do with the handicap may be blamed on it. It's easy to use the handicap as an excuse. Some children are overprotected and learn to let others act on their behalf. They develop another handicap—dependency.

Much of this could be avoided by treating the handicap in a matter-of-fact way, describing it clearly and giving the person only as much help as necessary. An unclear or stigmatizing label does not save an individual from many of the psychological effects of a handicap with no name.

DISCUSSING LEARNING DISABILITIES OPENLY

Some children have been diagnosed, but their parents have never told them about their handicap. If your teenager or young adult lives at home, tell him what you know. If you feel uncomfortable about this, ask the person who diagnosed your child to explain. Your son or daughter should know the answers to these questions:

- What exactly is the handicap? It's important to use and define the scientific terms.
- What improvement has been shown? This improvement should be ascribed to your child's effort, not "outgrowing it," upbringing or treatment technique.
- Has medication been used in treating the handicap? What medicines? What effect have they had? Are they still being used? How will dependency be reduced? What would happen if your child stopped taking medication?

A report should be given to the learning disabled person in writing or on tape. If your child hotly denies that she has a handicap, wait a few months and try again. Describe the handicap as it shows itself in various ways: for example, if she gives a bizarre response to something you say, ask, "What did you hear me say?" If she responds incorrectly, tell her what you really said and explain, "It sounds as if you made an error in auditory discrimination or sequencing." Without knowing what the problem is, your daughter may be unable to improve and may continue to blame herself for things that are not her fault.

If you are an adult who suspects that your parents know you have a learning disability, but will not discuss it, ask them directly and calmly. Ask if they will pay for a professional diagnosis. If they get upset or refuse to talk about it, wait a few months and try again. If they again refuse, remember that you may be stirring up difficult feelings: guilt, anger, denial, bad memories. Get as much information from this pamphlet as you can. Keep studying about learning disabilities. Eventually you will be able to arrange for a diagnosis on your own.

PROFESSIONAL DIAGNOSIS

Professionals who are willing and able to diagnose learning disabled adults are few and far between. They must rely chiefly on their observations, since tests for learning disabilities have been developed for children, not for adults. Many doctors believe that the signs of learning disabilities disappear in adulthood, although many adults have learning disabilities throughout their lives. Two types of diagnoses are possible for learning disabled people:

Medical Diagnosis

Neurologists, psychiatrists, and general practitioners often diagnose people with learning disabilities. Neurologists test for soft neurological signs, the symptoms of central nervous system dysfunction that can be observed. Other doctors examine for possible physical causes of sensory deficits such as loss of hearing or poor vision. They check for nutritional imbalances and biochemical problems. Psychiatrists confirm or deny emotional causes for the problems. Some agencies require a medical diagnosis before they will accept an individual for their services.

Educational Diagnosis

Psychologists and diagnostic prescriptive teachers administer a variety of tests to evaluate academic skills, perception and motor abilities. This type of diagnosis defines the learning disability and locates individual strengths. You should be able to find out through such an evaluation which learning "channel" is your best. Do you learn best through seeing, hearing, touching or a combination? Based on this knowledge of yourself, a plan to improve your skills can be developed. This type of diagnosis may be found through:

- State and local departments of education—They are required under Public Law 94-142 to provide information about where an independent educational evaluation may be obtained.
- College learning diagnostic centers—These are usually open only to enrolled students and are most common in community or junior colleges.
- Hospitals—Those that are connected to universities can be a good resource; other hospitals also may have special clinics that offer testing.

- Private educational testing centers —Check to see if they specialize in learning disabilities. Be sure you know the background and training of the person who will test you, what types of tests you will be given, and how much it will cost.

LOCATING A DIAGNOSTICIAN

Start with places that diagnose children. Call your local Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities and ask for their list of diagnostic centers. Check under "Schools with Special Academic Education" or "Reading Improvement Instruction" in the Yellow Pages. Call your local or county medical association and ask them if they can recommend a developmental or pediatric neurologist. Contact these people and ask them if they are willing to diagnose learning disabled adults. If they say "no," ask them to refer you to someone else.

Two public agencies can help provide a diagnosis:

Your local school district--Under P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, any person of school age who is having academic difficulty has the right to be evaluated for learning handicaps. The school district pays for this evaluation. Under the terms of the law, more than one test must be used to make a decision about the need for a special education program. Testing done by the school system will emphasize educational needs, strong points as well as weaknesses, the *way* a person learns best.

Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies—These offices, which exist in or near almost every city, are set up to help people with handicaps obtain appropriate job training and find (and keep) employment. One of the key services offered is evaluation of handicaps which interfere with employability. Vocational rehabilitation services are discussed more fully on page 25.

SELF-DIAGNOSIS

In many areas of the country, professional diagnosis is unavailable, or you may find the diagnosis unsatisfactory. Remember that you yourself are a diagnostic resource.

How can you determine if you have a learning disability? You may not be able to find out for sure, but you can decide whether you have problems similar to those faced by learning disabled persons. You can try suggested ideas in this pamphlet for dealing with them. And you can realize that you have a handicap, not a personal weakness. By using self-help techniques, you can overcome the effects of your learning disabilities. Then, it really doesn't matter whether or not you have them.

How do you diagnose yourself?

Think about yourself—Does what you have read so far sound as if it could be about you? Do you have a history of failure at school, social life, or work? Page 23 lists symptoms of learning disability in employment. Does this sound like you?

List problems—List mistakes that bring you in conflict with other people or cause you trouble, such as needing a great deal of time to accomplish a task. Read the definitions in Chapter Two.

Do your problems sound similar?

If you find yourself saying "yes" to these questions you may be learning disabled. In Chapter Six, entitled, "Overcoming Your Handicaps," self-help techniques are discussed.

The following chapter is for parents of economically dependent learning disabled adults, but we hope you will find it useful too as you take your own steps to independence.

4

Building an Independent Life

Like everyone else, learning disabled people must learn how to get along with others, manage their money, shop for necessities and find a place to live, if they are to become independent. These things demand time and effort from everyone, but they are far more challenging for learning disabled people.

PROBLEMS IN FAMILY LIFE

People who have learning disabilities may be disorganized. They may be sloppy, leaving possessions all over the house. They may lack a routine, making it difficult for their family to plan ahead. Some learning disabled people are clumsy and accidentally break household items. Carelessness, the mental equivalent of clumsiness, can be nerve-wracking: for example, a learning disabled adult may repeatedly leave the phone off the hook or forget to close a door behind him.

Housework may be extremely difficult. Washing dishes requires visual and tactile discrimination. Changing a lightbulb uses visual motor ability. Sweeping the floor depends on visual discrimination, motor coordination and ability to cross the midline. Many learning disabled people cannot see the difference between a clean and dirty floor. They might not notice that they left a dustpan in the middle of the room.

Family errands, such as shopping, present further problems. Learning disabled adults may have trouble getting to the store and finding what they need. Ripe, unripe and overripe bananas may look the same to them. Some learning disabled adults make errors in counting change and have trouble remembering to bring receipts home.

Following directions is hard for people with auditory perceptual handicaps. They might buy forty instead of four cans of soup or buy soap instead of soup. Or they might come home at eleven o'clock instead of seven o'clock.

Time is a difficult concept. Reversals make reading a clock confusing, and it is hard for disorganized people to get ready to be at a certain place by a certain time. They may get so absorbed in activities that they fail to notice the passage of time and keep people waiting.

Many learning disabled adults stay at home far beyond their teenage years. This forced dependency causes problems for the whole family. Mothers and fathers may resent having to live with an adult child and may envy the freedom of their friends whose sons and daughters are going to college and getting jobs. They may get angry at their learning disabled child and then feel guilty about their resentment. Learning disabled adults

usually dislike "being treated like a child" and may have a hard time meshing with their parents' routine.

FINDING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

If your son or daughter has any of the problems described above, you can help. Remember, no matter how severe the handicap, your child can change. As a first step, take stock of the interactions between your learning disabled child and the family.

Make a List of Problems

It may help to list the problems. Which bother you the most? Sort out those which cause inconvenience to you or to the family from those which are your son's own personal responsibility. An example of the former: your son leaves the bathroom and kitchen a mess each morning. An example of the latter: he doesn't do his homework.

Begin with problems that are personally disturbing. They may seem petty, but solving them is important to your peace of mind. Probably what you find upsetting will also bother your child's future roommates.

Start with one habit you'd like to help your child change. Be clear about what you want. Ask yourself:

- Has my child ever *not* behaved this way? If the answer is "yes," what was the difference between then and now?
- What have I already done about this? Have my efforts encouraged or discouraged him?
- Is my child's handicap one of the causes of this problem?
- Will it help if I change the way *I* act? Are there changes I should make in the environment?

For example: Marcia and Tom live with their learning disabled daughter, Janet. They described the situation this way: "We never knew what we'd come home to. She would leave the refrigerator door open, stove burners on, the door to the house unlocked. Twice we came home to a flooded kitchen because she left the water on and the drain plugged up."

Before Marcia returned to work, there was no problem. Marcia had seen to it that the burners were off, the refrigerator door was closed and everything was in order. The trouble started when she began leaving the house before Janet did.

Marcia and Tom realized that in order for Janet to become more responsible they needed to change the environment somewhat. They took stock. The refrigerator latch was worn. Sometimes it didn't click shut. People with normal perception noticed it, but Janet did not. That problem was easily solved: a refrigerator repairman fixed the latch. But handicaps were also part of the problem. Janet's memory was poor, and she had trouble remembering a sequence of tasks.

Discuss the Problem with Your Child

After you've pinpointed the problem, the next step is to talk to your child. Treat her as a peer during this conversation. Tell her the problem as you understand it yourself. Explain what you find disturbing. Ask her to help you. Criticize her behavior, not her character. Work out a solution together.

To continue the example, Janet didn't know why she forgot so many things. She said she remembered turning the burners off. Her parents asked her to show them. When she did, she overshot the "off" mark, so Tom painted a red arrow on the "off" mark. Memory was the basic problem, however. After a long conversation, Janet asked her parents to

make a list of things for her to do in the morning. She practiced several times. The next day, when Marcia came home, the house was in order and safe.

Remember to compliment your child as she improves. Even if the improvement is slight, she still deserves praise. After the first problem on your list is solved, work on another.

A Few Other Tips

- Don't be overprotective. Give only as much help as necessary: for example, if your son has a problem with a teacher or boss, help him practice what to say. In most cases, you should not talk to the teacher or boss.
- Be sure that people with auditory handicaps understand what you say. You may want them to repeat important instructions.
- Express yourself directly. Avoid hints or nonverbal signals.

TEACHING INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

Many learning disabled adults must be taught the skills necessary for independent living. They usually do not pick up the information on their own. Independent living skills include:

- shopping and cooking
- money management
- finding a home.

When teaching learning disabled people, keep these three principles in mind:

- Teach only the most important things.
- Divide tasks into small steps.
- Simplify the job.

Work with your learning disabled child to make sure you are teaching what is most important and relevant. Your child is unique — different from any other learning disabled person. Nothing written here should substitute for what you and your child think is right.

Cooking

Learning disabled people can become good cooks by watching and working with their parents. Some parents divide ingredients into two parts, and prepare one part while coaching their child to prepare the other half. Others must be taught more carefully. Here's how to apply the three principles outlined above.

Teach only what is most important in cooking — Before a person can live on his own, he must know how to obtain and prepare nourishing food. Usually this means:

- knowing how to shop
- cooking a few simple meals
- knowing how to balance meals.

The following brochures will be very helpful: "Food Is More Than Just Something to Eat," "Nutrition: Food at Work for You" and "Food." For a single free copy of each write to: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Divide tasks into the smallest possible steps—For instance, to teach a learning disabled person to crack an egg, the instructor might show how to:

- Take the egg out of the box and hold it without breaking it.
- Tap the egg on the side of the dish.
- Separate the eggshell from the egg without leaving the shells in the egg.

- Be sure all of the egg white is out of the eggshells by holding them upside down over the dish for a moment.
- Throw away the eggshells.
- Look for bits of eggshell in the egg.
- Fish them out with a spoon.

Simplify the work — This depends on the individual. Some people use plastic tableware and paper plates to keep from washing dishes. Teflon pans are easy to clean. Many foods are nutritious and easy to prepare. Here are a few ideas for simplifying shopping:

- Choose one store, preferably a small one. Learn the layout. Comparison shopping and sales are usually not worth the time and effort. Set up a routine and buy the same things again and again.
- Nonreaders can use their old labels to match with products in the store. Most ads have pictures. Shopping lists can be made from labels and ads. One can memorize a few key words or how certain labels look.
- If you can plan ahead, shop each week with a list. Otherwise, stock up with canned and frozen goods and buy what's needed each day.

Many learning disabled adults become good cooks. Jeff Barsch learned from watching educational television. He taped the shows and later followed directions in his kitchen.

Money Management

Whether people are supported by themselves, their parents or the government, they must know how to manage money. They should understand how to draw up a budget and use a checking account. If possible, they should be able to fill out tax forms, although they can hire somebody to take care of this. They must know how a W-2 form looks and that they must save them.

Learning disabled people should open a checking account in a bank and be taught how to use it. If they can't add or subtract, they can use a calculator. An index card with a hole in it can be used to check individual letters and numbers and prevent reversals. All personal items, such as clothes, food and entertainment should be paid from this account.

Parents may have to pay their handicapped children a certain amount each month until they can support themselves. Using a checking account teaches the basic concept of personal financing.

Budgeting is hard to teach since it is highly individual and requires willpower as well as a general understanding of financial principles. Some parents explain the family's expenses and income and tell their learning disabled child that when he lives on his own, he will have to work out his finances for the same things on a smaller scale.

Essentials should be paid first. Some learning disabled people manage by cashing their paychecks or government assistance checks each pay period and dividing the money into envelopes or jars. One learning disabled adult describes her budget as follows:

> "I get $120.00 each week. First, I buy my tokens. That way my transportation is taken care of. Then I put $40 in my rent jar and $10 in an envelope for my gas and electric bill. Once a month I pay these bills. I get money orders from the post office. Then I shop for all of my food. I usually have about $30 left each week and I put part of that in the bank. I spend the rest on clothes and sometimes a movie."

Budgets can take many forms. The important thing to teach your child is not to spend more money than he has. That's easy to do — even when you're *not* learning disabled!

Finding a Home

When learning disabled adults are ready to leave their parents' house, they sometimes need help in choosing new living quarters. They may be overwhelmed by the many options. Should they live in an apartment alone or with a roommate? Should they live in a house with a group of people? They may need advice in selecting a rent range or thinking through the factors involved in picking out a place to live: transportation costs, amount of space, noise levels, neighbors, neighborhood, convenience to shopping.

Parents can help their child list the pros and cons of various choices and come to a decision. Sometimes parents should see the place, since a person with visual perceptual problems is apt to overlook such things as a hole in the ceiling or peeling paint on the walls. A lawyer or legally experienced person should study the lease before it is signed.

Some learning disabled adults are ready to leave home but not ready to live completely on their own. They may need a group home or apartment with adult supervision. There may be transitional living or halfway house programs in the community, but it is more likely that you will have to act as a pioneer in creating this kind of opportunity. The first step is to talk with others who might be interested in such a project. The local chapter of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities may have members willing to work with you.

Because of their strong interest in halfway houses, the Association for Retarded Citizens might have some excellent information to use in the beginning. They have two brochures: "The Right to Choose: Achieving Residential Alternatives in the Community" gives step-by-step guidelines for people who want to set up community-based small group homes or apartments for handicapped adults. "Residential Programming for Mentally Retarded Persons" describes the philosophy, the development and the programming of a good group home. For copies, send $1.50 (each) to the Association for Retarded Citizens, 2709 Avenue E East, P.O. Box 6109, Arlington, Texas 76011.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has an Office of Independent Living for the Disabled. This office can tell you about federally funded programs. Write to: Office of Independent Living for the Disabled, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Room 9106, 451 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20410.

5

The World of Work

The problems that learning disabled adults have with their families foreshadow problems on the job. Someone who leaves possessions all over the house is bound to do the same thing with work tools unless he makes a conscious effort to change.

In business, clumsiness and carelessness are costly. The hammer left on the floor can cause a worker carrying expensive machinery to trip and break the equipment. An error made in a print shop could result in having to redo a whole job. Beyond the costs involved, these problems exasperate supervisors and coworkers and cause them extra work.

Clumsiness and carelessness are symptoms for only some learning disabled people. Each learning disabled individual has unique strengths and weaknesses. It is important to remember that people with learning disabilities *can* develop good work habits which will make them valued employees.

PROBLEMS ON THE JOB

Learning disabilities can have the following effects on one's work:

Inefficiency — It can take a learning disabled worker longer than others to do the same task.

Errors — Some learning disabled adults frequently make mistakes. The only way for them to keep from making errors is to be careful and go slowly. This may cause low productivity.

Accident proneness — Some learning disabled adults are easily startled. Those with visual perceptual problems often bump into things.

Difficulty with academic skills — This includes trouble in making change, filling out order forms, reading instructions and writing memos.

Problems in learning a sequence of tasks — Supervisors often report that it takes longer to train learning disabled adults.

Time — Some learning disabled adults have trouble being on time, either coming in late or overcompensating by coming in too early. They may have difficulty meeting deadlines.

Social skills problems — Social skills are usually just as important as performing a job well. They are discussed fully in Chapter Seven.

FINDING YOUR STRENGTHS

To succeed in the world of work, it is necessary to choose a job which will be a good one for you. Learning disabled adults should know how their handicaps affect them occupationally. But most important, they should know what they are good at, what they *can* do. Their job choice must be based on strengths: for example, one young man who could not read or write became the top salesman in a door-to-door magazine sales team that traveled all over the United States. He realized that his strength was persuasion, and he chose a job that required no paperwork. As a matter of fact, he was so persuasive, he convinced his customers to write out their names and addresses on the order blanks!

How can strengths be determined? "What Color Is Your Parachute?" by Richard Nelson Bolles has many practical exercises. Private job placement firms will administer tests and advise job-hunters. Vocational rehabilitation counselors may be able to help you choose the field that is right for you. Remember that vocational skills tests can serve as a valuable guide, but they are not accurate for everyone.

Many counselors steer learning disabled adults toward programs in which many mentally retarded people have been successful. Although at times this can work out, most retarded people have stronger perceptual motor skills than learning disabled people: for example, dishwashing, a job some retarded people do well, requires tactile discrimination between clean and greasy dishes, knowing how many dishes fit into the sink without making the water overflow, knowing the proper amount of soap to use, remembering where to put the dishes and stacking them in such a way that they cannot fall. None of this is easy for most learning disabled people.

A COLLEGE EDUCATION

Some jobs require more than a high school diploma. Most professional employment demands at least four years of college. Some learning disabled students can handle regular classes with accommodations, such as using tape recorders rather than taking notes, carrying fewer courses, taking untimed or oral tests or doing special projects instead of examinations.

Sometimes learning disabled people are not considered college material because they do not "look bright." Learning disabled adults who talk slowly, appear retarded or have soft neurological signs must make an extra effort to show how intelligent they really are.

There are many college programs for learning disabled adults. The Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities is revising its list of such programs. According to Katharine Tillotson, Chairman of the Post-Secondary Committee, it is expected to be available by the beginning of 1981 and there will be a small charge. The address of the Association can be found in Chapter Ten.

Time Out to Enjoy, Inc. has recently conducted a survey of colleges, universities and technical schools. The 1800 schools which were contacted were questioned on the existence and nature of programs for learning disabled students. The board of directors of the organization hopes that the findings will be available in October 1980. There will be a small charge for the booklet. Write to Time Out to Enjoy, Inc. at the address listed in Chapter Ten.

SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The Human Resources Development Institute of the AFL-CIO works toward placing

handicapped people in union jobs. Nine local centers provide information on employment opportunities which may include training in skilled apprenticeship trades. For more information write to: AFL-CIO-HRDI, 815 16th Street, N.W., Room 405, Washington, D.C. 20006, or call (202) 638-3914.

Many people need supervised job training before thay are ready for employment. A few sheltered workshops can fill this need. However, it is important to visit them to make sure they provide meaningful experience.

The Projects with Industry Program, funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, works with business and rehabilitation leaders to train handicapped people for jobs in their community. This program can assist in improving skills needed in a work environment. CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) programs in your community may offer job training and experience.

Because learning disabilities are not well-known, it may be difficult to get into these training programs. To locate these opportunities check with:

- your vocational rehabilitation agency
- your state employment office
- the local chapter of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities
- local chapters of other disability organizations that may have the information you are seeking, such as the United Cerebral Palsy Association, Easter Seal Society, Association for Retarded Citizens.

Vocational Education

Many learning disabled students can study in regular vocational education classes with accommodations similar to those used in colleges. Students with motor problems, directional problems, tactile perceptual problems and/or visual perceptual problems may need more hands-on practice than their peers, since these handicaps make learning vocational skills difficult. Getting the extra time may have to be worked out in advance, especially if access to the equipment is limited.

Students should check to see what is offered by their local school systems. Some have vocational education programs in high schools or community colleges. Others have large regional vocational-technical centers. Under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, these programs must be made available to students with handicaps.

Vocational Rehabilitation

One government agency which may help you find a job is vocational rehabilitation. Vocational rehabilitation is a nationwide program funded jointly by federal and state governments. Local offices exist in or near most cities. The program is for physically or mentally handicapped persons whose disabilities create a serious obstacle to employment. People with learning disabilities are eligible for these services when their disability has been diagnosed as a physical or mental handicap. The purpose of vocational rehabilitation is to help people overcome or cope successfully with their disabilities so they can become employed. This program makes it possible to get:

- evaluation of your disability and your job aptitudes
- counseling to help you choose and get ready for the right kind of work
- job training
- help in finding and keeping a job.

If you feel you need these services, the first step is to contact the local vocational rehabilitation office. Find it in your telephone book by looking under the section for your

state government's offices. If it isn't there, it will be listed alphabetically. (If you have difficulty, call Directory Assistance.) Your city or state information office may be able to help you. Governors' or mayors' offices often have such facts readily available.

The vocational rehabilitation agency must give you an appointment with a counselor if you request it. You will then be evaluated to see if you are eligible for services. Once you are accepted as a client, you and your counselor will develop a rehabilitation plan which can include a wide range of services, such as job counseling, vocational training, occupational therapy and transportation. Services may (but not always) include payment for tutoring, tuition payment for college courses and other post-secondary education. You may also be able to obtain aids such as tape recorders.

If you apply, remember that learning disabilities are not well understood. For this reason, it will help to take literature on learning disabilities with you. Take this pamphlet. Try to find out where you can be diagnosed ahead of time and tell your counselor. He can contract with other agencies or individuals for these services. It is extremely important to be clear about how your handicaps make it difficult for you to get or keep a job. If services are refused, the agency must state why. If the counselor will not help you, ask for a meeting between yourself, the counselor and his supervisor. The next level of appeal varies locally, but you have the right to ask the state vocational rehabilitation agency to review your case.

LOOKING FOR A JOB

After training, the job hunt begins. A well-qualified learning disabled adult can use the usual techniques. Sometimes a course on how to prepare a resume or do your best in an interview is helpful.

A few specific concerns:

- The application — Someone who is unable to read or write cannot fill out an application. If possible, have the application mailed to you. Or, you may be permitted to take one home. Someone else can fill it out. Sometimes a resume can be substituted. Learning disabled adults who can read and write must beware of making careless errors or filling out applications with sloppy or childish writing.
- The interview — It is essential to be punctual. This means confirming the time and place of the interview and giving oneself plenty of extra time.
- Grooming — Learning disabled adults must take pains to look neat. Persons with visual perceptual difficulties should have someone check them over before they meet their potential employer. Some people carry a neatly folded change of clothing in their briefcase. This is especially important on rainy or snowy days.
- Should the handicap be mentioned? — Talking about it can change the focus of the conversation from the applicant's ability to her disability. Most employers hesitate to hire handicapped people. If you bring it up, discuss it in a positive way with explanations as to how the problem will be dealt with on the job: for example, one social worker who could not read or write explained how she could work on a client's file by dictating into a tape recorder. If specific job accommodations are necessary, the handicaps should be mentioned. Good ways of talking about learning disabilities are mentioned on page 33.

Nontraditional Ways of Looking for a Job

In "What Color Is Your Parachute?" Richard Nelson Bolles suggests interviewing people who have positions similar to the one you want. Asking people about their work can help you decide if the job truly uses your strengths. Bolles also suggests researching

and interviewing potential employers to see if they have any problems that you may be uniquely able to solve. He recommends that you ask questions that help to locate jobs, rather than ask directly to be hired. This avoids putting anyone on the spot and gives you a chance to learn about the field. In this way, you enter the "hidden job market."

For learning disabled job-seekers, this approach has extra advantages. Applicants meet potential employers before being pitted against competition. While asking for career advice, they can bring up their handicap in context. An informational interview is less stressful than an actual job interview, since nothing is really at stake. This relaxed atmosphere is helpful, since tension exaggerates symptoms of learning disabilities.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT JOB

Learning disabled applicants should study the job as carefully as a potential employer studies them. The following factors should be considered:

The job — Understand all aspects of your duties. Analyze each step. Think about possible problems: for example, hyperactive adults should avoid a job that requires sitting in one place all day. If answering a phone is part of the job, a person may be unable to leave his desk. Is typing, reading, writing or driving involved? What needs to be memorized? Are accuracy, speed, being on time important?

Beware of hidden job requirements: for example, some nonsecretarial jobs demand typing, or a sales job may include paperwork. Request a written job description.

Personality of the direct supervisor — How patient is this person? Does she seem willing to accommodate your handicaps? If you have problems following directions, will the supervisor listen to you repeat things back? Will she put important directions in writing? How will she feel about your doing some things in a different way? Will she mind if you substitute phone calls for letters? Do you feel a sense of rapport with the supervisor?

Environment — A person with severe visual motor problems might decide against an office with desks crowded together or casual housekeeping habits such as cartons on the floor or open file drawers. A person with auditory perceptual handicaps needs to avoid situations with a high level of background noise or should arrange for a quiet place to work.

Company values — Do the employers see staff members as individuals or cogs in a wheel? Do they fire people frequently? How high a tolerance do they have for nonconformity?

BE PROUD OF THE WORK YOU DO

All jobs are important. Whatever you train yourself to do, whatever work you choose, respect it. Strive to do as well as possible and to reach the highest level you can. Although the talents of learning disabled people are often underestimated, their range of abilities is vast.

Some may think that learning disabled people are not smart enough to be managers. If you know that you do have management ability, keep working toward it. These jobs tend to allow the most accommodation for perceptual problems. It is often easier to get help from subordinates than from supervisors or coworkers: for example, a secretary can do perceptual motor aspects of a job for a professional who is learning disabled.

People may also think that learning disabled employees are too uncoordinated to repair machines or too socially inept to teach. But none of the symptoms of learning disability apply to all learning disabled people. Trust your judgment about which job is right for you.

Whether you become a photocopier or an administrator, a mail clerk or a special

education teacher, a veterinarian's assistant or a graphic artist, you should realize that you are contributing to your employer and your community. You can and should feel proud of your achievements.

No job is perfect. You will need to spend time overcoming your handicaps. But if you have chosen work based on your strengths, have studied the position thoroughly and have decided you can do it well, then you are on the way to successful performance.

6

Overcoming Your Handicaps

Learning disabled people can overcome their handicaps. But a handicap is unlike a weakness. Trying harder won't always help. You need a plan. This section describes how to develop a self-improvement plan and make it work.

ANALYZING YOUR STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND HANDICAPS

A self-help plan begins with an accurate analysis of handicaps, weaknesses and strengths. Chapter Three has suggestions for diagnosing your handicaps. Weaknesses such as laziness and impatience are personality characteristics which cause problems for yourself and others. They often develop as a result of being learning disabled and may disappear as you overcome your handicaps.

For many learning disabled adults, discovering one's strengths is a harder task. Compliments are rare; put-downs are more frequent. It may help to answer the following questions:

- What do I enjoy doing?
- What successes have I achieved?
- How do I "work around" my handicaps?

Study your replies. What do they have in common? Here's an example.

John, a learning disabled seventeen-year-old, decided to work on his handicaps. He had a fourth grade reading level and hated school. He was graduating from high school but suspected it was due to social promotions.

His parents had him tested. The diagnostician told him that he had trouble with visual sequencing and discrimination. His sense of direction was poor, and he had some motor problems. His auditory perception was excellent.

John knew that his handicaps caused him more than academic difficulty. He often got lost on the way to his girlfriend's house and was usually late. It was hard for him to fill out job applications. He had trouble with mechanical tasks because of his visual motor problems.

In answering the three questions listed above, John noted that he enjoyed listening to the radio and talking to people. Socially, he got along well with two friends he had known since childhood. He worked around his handicaps by listening well and taking the time to observe carefully.

He had successfully kept a paper route for three years. Before taking it over, he had spent a week walking the route with the previous owner. He got to know his customers and was always polite and friendly.

As he studied his answers, John realized that he had a pleasant personality and was a good listener. He also discovered he was disciplined, not lazy. Most of his classmates had quit their paper routes. They didn't like getting up early and working hard.

SOLVING YOUR PROBLEMS

Based on this kind of analysis, you can remediate your handicaps and use your strengths to work around weaknesses.

Choose a problem that you want to solve or think of a task that is difficult for you. It could be an everyday thing like cooking, buying clothes or starting a conversation with a stranger. Perhaps you want to overcome one of your perceptual problems or improve your social skills. Some people write a list of long-range goals and then think out the steps that will lead to those goals. Most people choose a few problems and begin work on them.

To continue the example: John decided that he wanted to widen his circle of friends. He realized that although one of his strengths was getting along with others, he really only had two pals. He resolved to meet new people. He realized that getting lost and being late for appointments or dates wasn't helping his popularity.

John's next step was to state his problem and set a clear goal for himself. He thought, "I am often late because I get lost. When I need to be somewhere new at a certain time, I'll practice driving there the day before. I'll try to be on time for my next three appointments."

Problems are not solved overnight, and one should keep track of even small victories. John, for example, practiced going to his girlfriend's house. He still got lost because he practiced in daylight but picked her up at night. Still, he was only ten minutes late, and he felt proud of that — rather than angry at himself for being late at all.

Sometimes one problem has many parts: for example, Karl knew he looked sloppy. This was caused by many things, most of which involved poor visual perception. His clothing often clashed. His hair wasn't always combed neatly. He didn't notice stains and rips in his clothes. He didn't always shave thoroughly. He asked his father to help him write a grooming checklist which he now goes over every day. It clearly states each step of his routine. He hangs matching clothes together. Ties are placed next to the right colored shirts. He makes sure his razor has good blades and shaves carefully. He checks himself in a full-length mirror for rips, stains and wrinkles in his clothes. He makes sure he looks his best before he leaves the house. His father and mother check him over, too.

LEARNING DIFFICULT TASKS

In some cases, you may have to learn a specific task that is especially difficult because of your disability. In this case, analyze and practice each step. As you learn each step, feel proud of yourself.

For example, Mary had to use her parents' new dishwasher. She practiced checking to see that the dishes were in place, pushing the racks of dishes into the dishwasher, pouring the right amount of detergent in the holder, closing the holder, shutting the dishwasher door firmly, checking to see that it was closed and turning the knob to the left to the "wash" position.

A Few Tips for Learning New Tasks:

- Have several people teach you, so they do not get impatient.
- Practice in a quiet place or when you are alone.

- As soon as possible, ask someone to watch you do it correctly.
- If you are unable to do a certain task, find out why and solve the problem: for example, Mary kept on turning the knob the wrong way. She put vinyl on the left side of the knob to help her remember the right direction.
- Sometimes, the task should be made easier while practicing it: for example, John often got lost in certain confusing parts of town. He learned to drive in these areas on Sundays when the traffic was light.

As you work to overcome your handicaps, remember that although it is not easy, someone with your inner strength and determination can do it. Feel proud with each success, no matter how small. Be confident that you will reach your goals.

7

Improving Social Skills

Many learning disabled adults have trouble meeting people, working with others and making friends. They do not "fit in" easily. Social skills problems are a part of the handicap of learning disabilities.

These problems can cause difficulty in making a good first impression. Grooming is hard for those with fine motor and visual perception problems. Soft neurological signs can cause an odd appearance. Speech may come slowly and with difficulty.

Due to their perceptual problems, learning disabled individuals may have trouble understanding others. A person who cannot visually discriminate between light and dark colors will also be unable to tell the difference between a happy and sarcastic smile. A person unable to discriminate between a "v" and "b" sound may not be able to tell the difference between joking and questioning voices. People with auditory handicaps work so hard to understand the words of a statement, they may ignore the nonverbal meaning. This confusion can cause learning disabled adults to respond incorrectly.

It is extremely difficult for learning disabled people to pick up the social customs many of their peers take for granted: small talk, entering a circle of people, introducing themselves to strangers. Learning disabled people are in culture shock in their own culture.

FORMING A SOCIAL NETWORK

How can you, a learning disabled person, end your loneliness? Remember, lack of social grace is fairly common. Classes in assertiveness training can teach the hidden rules. "Don't Say Yes When You Want to Say No" by Herbert Fensterheim and Jean Baer is a book that describes many social situations and how to deal with them. You can probably find it in your neighborhood library or bookstore.

Practice makes perfect and your abilities will improve as you become more socially active. The rules are more obvious in structured situations such as meetings and classes than in unstructured situations such as parties and dates.

Find a group with an interest you share. It might be a hiking club, service organization, diet club or some other group that meets regularly. If you don't enjoy the people, leave the group after one or two meetings. Then look for another. Once you find a group you like, invite people to your house or go to a movie or bowling. Search out other people who need friends.

Meanwhile, develop a social self-help plan and work on your weak areas: for

example, you may speak too loudly. You may not be able to hear the volume of your voice. In that case, put your hand on your throat; talk loudly, then softly. Can you feel a difference? Studying your voice may help you to know when you should lower it. If not, ask people you know to tell you when you talk too loudly. When you speak, remember to speak softly. Eventually, it will become a habit.

You may not know how people take turns talking. When people want to interrupt each other, they use a subtle cue such as leaning towards the speaker or making a low sound. The person talking will usually wind up his thoughts.

If these signals do not make sense to you, you may talk on and on, or be unable to get a word in edgewise. Watch people and study the flow of conversation. When you understand these rules, practice them. When you have something to say, signal and wait until the person winds up his thoughts. Then speak and be alert for cues that the other person wants to talk. Constant practice will make it automatic.

Help People Work With You Rather Than Against You

In order to overcome your social problems, you need help. But you may find that people hesitate to assist you. When you ask, you may be accused of being unwilling to do your fair share. You are expected to act "normal" and when you accidentally do something wrong, you may be laughed at or ignored.

Since your handicap is not obvious, it is natural for people to think that you are behaving the way you do on purpose: for example, if you interrupt people a lot, they may think you do not care about what they are trying to tell you. If you can't do housework very well, your roommates or parents may believe you are trying to get out of it because you're lazy. It is difficult for people to feel empathy for an invisible handicap that they don't understand.

TALKING ABOUT YOUR HANDICAPS

People may be more understanding and helpful if they know about your handicap. Information about your disability can be given with the scientific words in Chapter Two or in simple everyday language. You can say either, "I have an auditory sequencing problem" or "I have trouble hearing sounds in order." Use simple words with your friends.

Scientific jargon is helpful when you need to impress people with the seriousness of a situation and make it clear your learning disability is a handicap, not a minor weakness: for example, if you need to tape a class and you must tell your teacher why, you might explain that you have "dyslexia due to visual perceptual problems." If you use the phrase "learning disability," be ready to explain the difference between a learning disabled and mentally retarded person.

Don't mention your handicap right after you make a mistake. If you act ashamed, people will think of your handicap as shameful. Dian Ridenour suggests, "Don't tell your friends about your handicap until you know they are friends. Otherwise, they'll only see the learning disability."

Wait until the person is feeling good about you. Be sure of yourself and express your thoughts positively. It may help to connect the disability to one of your good points: for example, "I noticed that mistake in the bylaws because I read very slowly. My learning disability forces me to concentrate and read one word at a time. It takes me a long time, but I don't miss anything!"

Be Clear About the Kind of Help You Need

If you need help from other people, be specific. Make eye contact. Ask directly for what you want. Thank them if they help you and be prepared to return the favor. Some examples of specific requests:

- "I can't see very well. Can you read the label on this dress for me?"
- "If I come in again with clothes that clash, please let me know. I can't always see things like that."
- "Please let me finish. I know I talk slowly, but it's a lot easier for me when people let me finish my sentences."
- "Please let me repeat your instructions. Listen to me, so you can be sure I have them right. It won't help if you tell me again. I need to say them myself to remember them."
- "Could you do me a favor and drop by my office on your way to the executive staff meeting? Sometimes I get so absorbed in my work that I forget the time."

Gaining Respect from Others — A Few Tips

- Be patient with others' impatience with you.
- Take responsibility for your actions. Admit your mistakes. Pay for anything you break or lose.
- Apologize as little as possible. Turn apologies into compliments. Say, "Thank you for being so patient," instead of "I'm sorry I'm so slow."
- If you must apologize, apologize for your behavior, not your personality. Say, "I'm sorry I knocked down those books," instead of "Sorry I'm such a klutz."
- In most cases say, "It's difficult for me to do that," rather than "I can't do it" or "I won't do it."
- Don't let people put you down. If they try, reply with the word "you" in your response. For example, if someone says, "You don't even know where the cafeteria is!" you might reply, "Why are you trying to embarrass me about that?"
- Develop your strong points so you gain self-respect and become a valued member of the community.

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Coping With Specific Disabilities

PRACTICING YOUR PERCEPTION

Perceptual problems can be improved by practice. Some people think this can't be done. They forget that normal people improve their perception through training and effort. A piano tuner improves his already good auditory discrimination. A medical student learns to visually discriminate subtle shadows on x-rays.

But people with perceptual problems are handicapped. If you have a visual figure-ground problem, you may work as hard as that medical student just to be able to spot your friends in crowded places. Or, if you are uncoordinated, you may have to train as hard as any football player in order to throw and catch a Frisbee.

Activities that use your areas of perceptual weakness can help you practice them. A few examples follow:

Visual figure-ground problems — Look around you and focus on objects. Look at a forest and study each tree. Study the lawn, find an insect and watch it move. Choose a specific person in a crowd and watch what she does.

Auditory sequencing problems — Listen and then repeat. This can be done by playing a taped conversation, repeating a sentence from memory and playing that section of the tape again to check yourself. In conversations, say "So what you are saying is . . ." and repeat what you heard. Check and see if you were correct.

Tactile discrimination problems — Go to stores and feel the different textures of similar items. Can you tell cotton from wool? Ripe from unripe fruit? In the woods feel the leaves and the bark on trees. Study shapes and textures.

Make a game out of practicing your perception. Don't work too hard. Find a level that challenges you but isn't too difficult.

Hobbies in your area of weakness can be fun: for example, bird watching improves visual perception. Stamp collecting helps visual motor skills and visual perception. Listening to music helps auditory perception.

Although practice can improve your perception, it probably won't make the handicap disappear. How can you limit its effect on your life? The next sections on visual and auditory handicaps will give you some ideas.

LIVING WITH VISUAL PERCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Improve your environment — Home and office should be simple, uncluttered and well organized. Color codes and labels help to keep things in order. Keep important

objects where you can see them. Shelves and pegboard walls are better than drawers. Mark your automobile so you can find it in a crowd of cars: for example, put a large object on the antenna or use a vanity license plate. If you have problems following your companions in a crowd, ask them to wear bright colors.

Improve your habits — Karl solved his grooming problem with an organized routine. Good habits can reduce your need for accurate visual perception. Have a place for important objects and train yourself to put them there: for example, always put your keys in a specific place.

When you leave your house, have a routine for keeping track of items such as your umbrella, purse and gloves: for example, you may want to always keep your briefcase in your lap. When you leave an area, be sure to have everything with you.

Find objects you lose — No matter how careful they are, people with visual perception and memory problems often lose things. If you can't find something, keep calm. Try to remember when you had it last. What did you do with it? Then relax your eyes and look for it. Don't look carefully by focusing your eyes first in one place, then another. Swing your eyes all over the room. Use your peripheral vision. If you still can't find it, consider waiting until it shows up. Can you buy another? If you need it, systematically look in and under things. If it's still missing, take a long break and start over.

If you lose things frequently, keep duplicates of important cards that go in your wallet, such as your identification card or library card. Leave extra keys with your neighbor or taped to the bottom of your office desk. Reproduce documents that should not be lost. Buy two or three umbrellas, scarves, pairs of gloves and other frequently lost items.

Use your hands to help your eyes — Study shapes, textures and weights with your hands: for example, good quality paper is usually heavier and stiffer than poor quality paper.

Use your ears to help your eyes — When a task is being demonstrated, pay more attention to the words than to the actions. Ask questions. The sound of someone's voice can substitute for an expression on her face. Tapes can replace books.

LIVING WITH DYSLEXIA

Learning without reading — For people who can't read, taped books can substitute for written ones. Lectures can also be taped. Individuals with dyslexia are eligible for two recorded book progams:

Recording for the Blind, Inc. (RFB), 215 East 58th Street, New York, New York 10022. RFB is a national, non-profit service organization which supplies recorded educational materials to visually, physically and perceptually handicapped students and professionals free of charge. RFB supplies clients with duplicated tapes of books currently in its recorded library of 50,000 texts and also tapes new material. Services are provided to individuals only. To register with RFB you must complete an application. If you are learning disabled, you must state in detail the exact nature of your disability, how it prevents you from reading normal printed material, and a doctor must sign it. Application information is held in confidence.

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20542, (202) 882-5500. To use this service, you must have a doctor certify that you have a "reading disability due to organic dysfunction." Check with your local public library about applying.

At school you can arrange ways for meeting your academic needs. Analyze your learning style and use your strong areas. Dian Ridenour who has dyslexia recognized that

she had excellent auditory perception. She found classmates in her school who were interested in forming a study group. The classmates read the material and a group discussion followed. There are many things you can do to satisfy your own study needs. Use your imagination and find creative solutions. Another idea: check into classes on educational television. Sometimes arrangements can be made for credit through your local college or university.

Communicating without writing — Make phone calls instead of writing letters. Use the Yellow Pages since it has pictures. If you have to pay for telephone information in your area, call your telephone company business office and ask for an exemption form. All you need to do is write down your disability, why you can't use the phone book and the name and address of the doctor who knows your condition. This will excuse you from charges.

If you must write a letter, dictate it to a secretary. Find typists who excel in proofreading, grammar and spelling if you are unable to check their work. If you can't afford to pay, find a service you can trade with a friend.

Working without reading — Jobs which require a lot of reading may have to be avoided. But remember blind people fill many professional jobs by using tape recorders and paying readers. The pamphlet "Dilemma of a Dyslexic Man" by Bert Kruger Smith describes how Dwayne, a reserve policeman, successfully coped with his dyslexia and performed the duties of his job. "I carried a clipboard," he said. "And when I had to check some infraction, I looked at the front sheet where the various ones were listed. Then I would copy a word very carefully. Often when I [illegible] write a name and address, I would ask the person himself to write it." (This pamphlet and the sequel "Free to Learn" can be purchased as a set for 50 cents. Contact: The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, Publications Division, P.O. Box 7998, University Station, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712.)

Dwayne also had to write reports. He worked out an exchange. He did the leg-work for a coworker's report, and the coworker did the writing for Dwayne's report.

Dwayne illustrates two principles for working without reading:

- Write out or memorize important words.
- Exchange tasks that involve reading and writing for other tasks.

Remediation — Learning, communicating and working without reading are not easy. Some adult dyslexics choose to undergo the difficult process of learning to read. If you make that choice, avoid clinics that do not know about learning disabilities. They may say that "you're just not trying." Find a teacher who is experienced in instructing adult dyslexics. The Orton Society, which devotes itself to helping individuals with specific language learning disabilities, may be able to guide you toward such a teacher. Write The Orton Society, Inc., 8415 Bellona Lane, Suite 113, Towson, Maryland 21204, or call (301) 296-0232.

LIVING WITH AUDITORY PERCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Improve your environment — Limit the background noise around you. Try to live and work in quiet places. Turn on appliances and listen to them before buying them.

Use your eyes to help your ears — Look at people's faces and lips as you listen. Watching them do things will reduce your need for explanations: for example, if you are going to work at McDonald's, watch people work in another McDonald's before you begin the job. Read a lot to learn what you may not "pick up" through hearing.

Follow directions carefully — If directions are given verbally, repeat them. As you say

them, make sure people are listening to you. If possible, write them down or ask to receive them in writing. You may have to ask for one direction at a time. But no matter what, be sure to remember the *first* thing you are told, so that your first step will be correct.

LIVING WITH BOTH AUDITORY AND VISUAL PERCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Some people have both visual and auditory perceptual handicaps. This causes insecurity. Neither sense can be trusted. One sense cannot easily be used to compensate for the other. If you have this problem, decide if one sense is actually stronger and use it to help the weaker one. If both senses seem equally inaccurate, practice your perception as proposed on page 35, working with one sense at a time. Don't be surprised if your senses develop unevenly. Your ears may seem stronger for a while, then your eyes may seem stronger. For the most part, the sections on living with visual and auditory perceptual problems will apply to you.

Here are a few tips to help you learn:

- Get information from as many sources as possible, for example, if you are taking a class, you might:
  - — discuss the class with other students
  - — read or listen to as many books as possible, including books written for youngsters, if they cover your material
  - — ask if you can audit another section of the class
  - — ask your library if they can arrange for you to watch films and videotapes of the material
  - — get help from the instructor.
- Because of your double handicap, you are especially apt to make mistakes. When errors occur, correct them immediately. Don't get angry with yourself.
- Practice a lot but be careful not to overload yourself. Many short periods of effort are better than one long period of work.
- Your perception will be uneven. Some days will be better than others. Don't push yourself when everything seems to be going wrong.
- Ask yourself how you *like* to do and learn things. Use that technique. You will naturally find the most efficient way for you.
- Should you use taped books and lectures? Taped books may not be helpful as you may have to listen to the tapes many times.
- You will have to use your eyes and ears together to learn a task which is being demonstrated.

IMPROVING PERCEPTION

It's hard to learn when both your seeing and hearing are inaccurate. Try to improve perception by:

Paying attention — Some people who receive inaccurate information from their senses ignore their environment. They daydream and let their minds wander. Don't let this happen to you. Struggle to be aware.

Relaxing — Some people who receive inaccurate information from their senses pay so much attention that what they see and hear confuses them even more. If you relax, your perception will automatically improve.

Most people with perceptual problems alternate between paying too little and too

much attention. Try to find a state of relaxed awareness. Most people without learning handicaps have a section of their brain which automatically keeps them relaxed and aware. You may have to train yourself to do this consciously.

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Dealing With Your Disorganized Central Nervous System

IMPROVING YOUR MOTOR ABILITIES

Keep physically fit — This is hard for people who have always been clumsy. Nevertheless, it is very important. A strong body helps keep the mind and senses strong. Physically fit people may have an easier time controlling their hyperactivity. Almost all athletic activities improve your sense of balance and sense of where you are in space (your vestibular and proprioceptive senses). Your visual and auditory perception will also be improved. You should participate in sports with people at your skill level.

Find an exercise you enjoy and do it often — Walking, hiking and running are simple, and don't require especially good coordination. Swimming can be fun and floating in the water makes people feel graceful. Calisthenics can be done alone, are usually self-paced and may involve crossing the midline. Many learning disabled people say that karate and yoga have improved their coordination and helped them keep calm.

Keep track of your progress and feel proud of each success — Compare yourself with what you did last week, not with other people. Find another class, track or pool if you are teased. As an adolescent or adult, you do not have to put up with the things you endured as a child.

If you have moments when you don't know where your body is in space, it helps to stop, be still and relax. Be aware of each part of your body. If you get confused or dizzy, sit down or lean against the wall.

A learning disabled person with coordination problems must learn to love his or her body and feel at one with it.

TELLING RIGHT FROM LEFT

You may not automatically know right from left. Intellectually, you can tell the difference, but you don't have the instinctive knowledge. This lack of an anchor to the world makes getting lost a frightening experience.

Wear a piece of jewelry on the hand or arm you use most to aid you in distinguishing right from left. It may help if it is heavy or bright. To remember which direction you were going before you entered a building, carry something in the hand which will face in that direction as you leave and make sure you go out of the building using that same entrance.

OVERCOMING SOFT NEUROLOGICAL SIGNS

Someone meeting a learning disabled person for the first time may feel uneasy. He

might not know why he feels such anxiety. But unconsciously, he may try to avoid the learning disabled person.

Why is this? Soft neurological signs, the visible results of central nervous system dysfunction, may be an explanation. To review, some examples of "odd looking" soft neurological signs are:

- staring
- turning the head, not the eyes
- not being able to look people in the eye
- overreacting to stimuli, for instance, jumping because someone shuts a door
- not holding the head straight.

If you think any of these are your problem, you must consciously try to blink, hold your head straight and look people in the eye.

Some soft neurological signs are not as controllable as others. You may have a delay in processing sensory information. This may cause you to appear to hesitate in your replies, laugh after everyone else has stopped or nod your head at inappropriate points in conversation. Your movements may be disorganized. You might appear rigid and tense.

If you have soft neurological signs or any other problems that cause people to feel uncomfortable, it may help to bring them out into the open. Say, "I'm sorry I'm staring so much, but I can't help it." Or, "The reason it's taking me so long to answer you is that I'm thinking about everything you've said."

OVERCOMING DISINHIBITION

The self-awareness that helps you to overcome soft neurological signs will also help you overcome disinhibition, the difficulty in automatically behaving appropriately. Disinhibition is not your fault. It is part of the handicap. People without this problem don't have to worry about coughing without covering their mouth, talking aloud to themselves or making embarrassing statements. A section of their brain watches over them and keeps them from doing these things. You, on the other hand, will have to watch yourself consciously. If you have a problem with disinhibition, try to:

- Avoid making aimless motions with your hands. Some learning disabled adults interlock their fingers or hold their knees.
- Be careful to keep your mouth closed when you are not talking.
- Encourage friends and family to tell you if you behave inappropriately or say something out of line. People who know you may ignore embarrassing statements. Watch their faces carefully and listen to their responses. Thank them when they tell you about saying or doing something wrong.
- Remember, the struggle against disinhibition is hard. Sometimes it seems as if the minute you relax, the old behaviors are back again! But as your conscious mind gets used to its new work, your unconscious will take over the job.

HARNESSING THE ENERGY OF HYPERACTIVITY

Hyperactivity can be used to your advantage. It can enable learning disabled adults to work longer and harder. Find your best pace. If you need to move around a lot, you may want to organize your duties so you can take little walks or do some errands. Or, you may want to make an effort to slow down. This helps you know where you are in space and prevents accidents. Meditation and yoga can help.

Jeff Barsch finds that a fast pace is not the most efficient for him. He uses a metronome on 40 beats per minute to slow himself down. Many of his students have used this

technique with good results. Some of them put it on a fast beat in the morning, if they have trouble waking up.

If your hyperactivity seriously interferes with your ability to work, see your physician. Appropriate medication, well monitored under a doctor's supervision, can help learning disabled adults.

DEALING WITH CATASTROPHIC RESPONSE

Catastrophic response describes what happens when you involuntarily overreact because too much is going on around you or within your mind. It seems that when your central nervous system gets overloaded with stimulation, it turns off for a while. You may lose your temper. You may be unaware of the environment for a few seconds and appear to freeze. At times, the period of unawareness may last longer. When such a severe catastrophic response is over, you may feel disoriented, not knowing how much time has passed or where you are.

Try to prevent catastrophic response. Learn what situations cause it, and avoid them. How do you feel before it happens? If you can identify a specific feeling such as confusion, dizziness, sounds too loud, sights too bright, you might be able to prevent the response by:

Isolating yourself — Find a quiet place to rest for a while. At parties, find an empty room. If you are on a crowded street, find a small store, place of worship or a side road.

Taking a break — If you are being tutored, tell the teacher you need to stop for a while. If you are studying or working alone, relax for a few minutes.

If you "freeze" for a moment during a conversation, look around. If nobody has reacted, continue talking or listening. If people are giving you puzzled looks or calling your name, say, "Sorry, I was thinking hard about. . . ." or "Sometimes I space out a little, sorry." Then show that you are in control of yourself by acting as if nothing happened.

If you are disoriented after a catastrophic response, remain calm. Sit down and relax. Find out where you are and what time it is. Look around. Take time to absorb the environment. If you are still disoriented, call someone who knows about your problem.

If you lose your temper, apologize. If appropriate, explain that sometimes you overreact when there are too many sights and sounds.

CONTROLLING PERSEVERATION

Perseveration (repeating the same action again and again) can also be prevented by noting what brings it on and avoiding those conditions.

Don't do tasks involving motor coordination unless you can switch to another activity. If you make a mistake more than three times, take a break or do something else.

If you find yourself thinking in circles (mental perseveration), don't read or listen to the same material again and again. Approach it from a different angle. Ask someone to explain it to you or find the same information written in another way.

If you often say the same thing over and over again, encourage people to interrupt you. When someone doesn't seem to understand you, pause. See if they ask a question before you repeat yourself.

IMPROVING YOUR MEMORY

A poor memory is common among learning disabled people. If you have a poor memory, try to discover how you remember best. What do you remember and how do

you recall it? Some ways to help memory are:

- Write important things in one notebook or calendar that you always carry with you.
- Ask people to remind you of important events.
- Associate one thing with another: for example, you may recall more facts if you read or listen to two books on the same subject and compare them.
- Use information as soon as you learn it: for example, if you are introduced to someone, repeat the name a few minutes later in conversation.
- Sometimes, smelling and tasting can help the memory. Chew a certain flavor of gum or open a bottle of vanilla extract while studying for a test. On the day of the examination, chew that flavor of gum again or put a dab of vanilla extract on your arm.

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Resources For Further Help

LEARNING MORE ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

Some of the suggestions in this pamphlet will help you. Choose the ones that are right for you. The more you find out about learning disabilities, the better your decisions will be. Many learning disabled adults have studied the subject so thoroughly that they have entered the field of learning disabilities professionally.

Here are a few sources of information:

- Closer Look, a national resource center for parents of children with handicaps. The organization publishes a bibliography, "Reading About Learning Disabilities," which lists and describes useful books. The address is Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013.
- A local chapter of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities. A member of the group will probably be happy to talk to you. These chapters often hold meetings or workshops at which experts discuss learning disabilities.
- Special education departments of local colleges may give classes you can join or may be able to tell you about worthwhile local or regional conferences.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Self-help, as described in this pamphlet, is not possible for all learning disabled adults. Many learning disabled people have so many emotional scars as a result of society's reactions that their feelings will have to be dealt with first.

In this case, a therapist can help. Whoever treats you must know about your learning disabilities and be able to help you understand their impact on your life. How can you find such a therapist? Professionals are best found through referrals. If you were diagnosed, ask the person who tested you to recommend someone. Ask your local chapter of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities. You may also find a qualified person through the American Psychiatric Association or the American Psychological Association, but be sure the individual has an understanding of learning disabilities or has successfully worked with other learning disabled people. Therapy in the hands of a skilled professional has helped many learning disabled adults to be proud of overcoming their handicaps rather than ashamed of having them.

SELF-HELP GROUPS

All over the country, learning disabled adults are joining together to discuss mutual

problems, advocate for each other, share information and inform the public about learning disabilities. Since the handicap is invisible, learning disabled people can identify themselves only by speaking up about their disabilities. The national efforts in this direction are:

- The Youth and Adult Section of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) has three major goals: (1) to increase awareness of the strengths and needs of people with learning disabilities, (2) to provide a vehicle for persons with learning disabilities to give peer support, and (3) to serve as an advocate for the general welfare of all individuals with learning disabilities. Many state and local affiliated groups are scattered throughout the country. For more information contact: Youth and Adult Section, ACLD, 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15234, (412) 341-1515.
- Time Out to Enjoy, Inc., a national self-help group for learning disabled adults, has three functions: (1) to educate the public on the problems of learning disabilities through workshops, panel presentations and speakers, (2) to supply information on diagnostic, remedial and professional resources for learning disabled adults, and (3) to provide outreach services to learning disabled adults. This includes consultation to aid in developing self-help groups by/for learning disabled adults. A 60 minute taped interview of two learning disabled adults talking about the organization, their learning disabilities and reasonable accommodation is available for $5.00. For more information write or send a cassette tape to: Time Out to Enjoy, Inc., 113 Garfield Street, Oak Park, Illinois 60304, (312) 383-9017 (phone number on weekends only).
- LAUNCH, Inc., is a self-help group that has local chapters in Texas. Its board of directors is willing to help other organizations of learning disabled adults. It publishes a national newsletter available free from LAUNCH, Inc., Department of Special Education, East Texas State University, Commerce, Texas 75428.
- The National Network of Learning Disabled Adults is serving as a clearinghouse of information. It is designed to help learning disabled adults locate each other in their communities. On a national level, it will help people with similar problems exchange experiences and ideas. If you wish to be on the mailing list, send your name and address to: National Network of Learning Disabled Adults, P.O. Box 3130, Richardson, Texas 75080. Indicate whether or not you are learning disabled.

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A Bright Future

The future is bright for learning disabled adults. Once they learn to deal with their handicaps and develop their strengths, learning disabled people can do anything.

Strong evidence suggests that many geniuses of the past had learning disabilities. Thomas Edison was thrown out of school and educated by his mother. Albert Einstein flunked math. His teacher thought he was retarded. Leonardo Da Vinci's manuscripts have many reversals which he claimed were a secret code. But experts have commented that there are reversals within the reversals. Royal tutors tried without success to teach Hans Christian Andersen to read. His stories were dictated to a scribe.

Although it is hard to generalize, learning disabled people often have the following strengths:

Creativity — Incorrect perception leads to a slightly different way of looking at the world. Inability to think in an orderly way can lead to new solutions to problems.

Self-Discipline — An invisible handicap must be overcome while receiving little praise. This takes a lot of inner strength.

Overcompensation — Disadvantage can be turned to advantage: for example, some learning disabled people overcome their disorganization by becoming superorganized. Or a person who is overly aware of background noise becomes a sound engineer — a job in which ability to hear this sound is important. The need to check and recheck for errors can lead to greater thoroughness. And convincing people to help you can develop strong social skills.

Inner-Directedness — Learning disabled people tend to follow their principles and are less apt to run with the crowd.

The handicaps of learning disabilities can lead to strengths of character. Each person with learning disabilities has different abilities. Like everyone else, they want to share their talents with others. Each learning disabled person is unique and has something special to offer the world.

Bibliography

These publications may give you further understanding of some of the problems that were discussed in this pamphlet. Check your library or bookstores for prices.

Don't Say Yes When You Want to Say No by Herbert Fensterheim, Ph.D. and Jean Baer. New York, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1975. This book is referred to on page 32. It describes many of the hidden rules on social interaction and discusses how to get your way without being aggressive. Specific chapters cover: achieving a social network, changing habits and developing good relationships with people at work.

Pulling Up Roots by Quentin Schenk and Emmy Lou Schenk. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978. Written as a guide to parents of "NQAs" (Not Quite Adults, Not Quite Adolescents). Although this book is addressed to mothers and fathers of nonhandicapped youngsters, the suggestions should prove helpful to the parents of learning disabled adults living at home.

Reversals: A Personal Account of Victory Over Dyslexia by Eileen Simpson. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979. This book is an autobiography of a woman who has dyslexia. She vividly describes her life from early childhood to adulthood. It may be helpful to parents or professionals who wonder how it feels to be dyslexic.

What Color Is Your Parachute? — A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers by Richard Nelson Bolles. Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1980. This book was discussed on pages 24 and 26. It describes a new technique of job hunting which includes researching a field of interest and interviewing potential employers to see if they have problems that you may be uniquely able to solve. The method can be adapted to almost all learning disabilities.

Learning Disability: Not Just a Problem Children Outgrow, 1979. This brochure can be ordered free from The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C. 20210. It goes into detail about employment problems of learning disabled adults and how to form self-help groups. A resource guide is included.

CANHC Vocational Kit, 1976. Published by the California Association for Neurologically Handicapped Children, P.O. Box 61067, Sacramento, California 95860. This was the first manual written about vocational problems of learning disabled adults. The information is based on a research project on the vocational training of 20 neurologically handicapped young adults. Sections of interest include: "Driving and the Perceptually Handicapped. Is it Safe?" "Chapel Haven: A Transitional Experience in Independent Living," and "Volunteering: Fastest Way to a Paying Job." Written for parents and professionals, this kit has many tips for helping learning disabled adults succeed in the

professionals, this kit has many tips for helping learning disabled adults succeed in the world of work. The cost of the kit is $10, plus $1 for shipping. California residents should add tax.

Note: Prices quoted for publications mentioned in this pamphlet were checked before going to press in June 1980.

A taped version of this pamphlet is available from the local regional branches of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. For a complete list of member libraries, contact: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Reference Section, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20542.